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WINGING into the FUTURE

A BLM Strategy for Nongame and Migratory Birds

Indigo Bunting

U.S. Department of the Interior
Bureau of Land Management

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Some species of America's birding heritage are in jeopardy, in particular several species of neotropical and nongame migratory birds. Neotropical refers to about 250 species of birds breeding in North America and wintering south of the border in Mexico, the Caribbean, and Latin America. Neotropical migrants are some of the most beautiful and familiar species of birds in our country—warblers, tanagers, buntings, finches, sparrows, and hummingbirds.

The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) is your steward for 270 million acres of public lands in the 11 Western States and Alaska. These public lands—providing homes to more than 3,000 species of mammals, birds, reptiles, fish, and amphibians—contain a variety of ecosystems and spectacular habitats that range from deserts to Arctic plains throughout our Nation. Managing these valuable resources through its strategic plan, *Fish & Wildlife 2000*, the BLM is ensuring an abundance and diversity of fish, wildlife, and special status plant resources on the public lands into the 21st century.

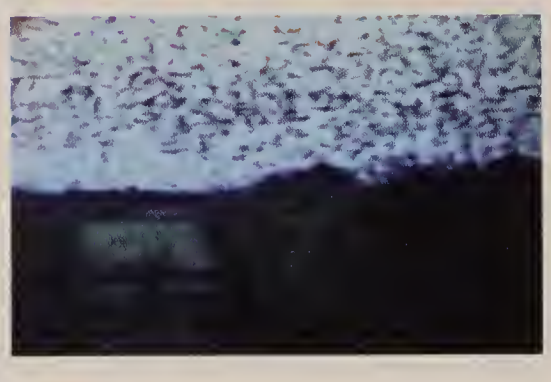
To better manage nongame birds and their habitats, the BLM has prepared and is implementing its own *Nongame Migratory Bird Habitat Conservation Strategy Plan*. The BLM is involved in many forms of habitat management benefiting nongame migratory birds and is implementing its long-term strategy to reverse diminishing populations of those neotropical species in serious peril. The key components of this plan include:

- Determining the status and trends of nongame birds and identifying their habitats on BLM lands.
- Conducting research to restore, maintain, enhance, and conserve populations of nongame birds through a variety of habitat management practices.
- Educating the public and promoting the value of nongame bird species to our natural heritage.
- Building on existing relationships and establishing new partnerships to foster global conservation programs for migratory bird species.
- Participating as an active member of the international program known as PARTNERS IN FLIGHT—AVES DE LAS AMERICAS.

Dickcissel

"Up Close and Personal"

This neotropical migratory bird species flocks in the thousands to certain areas of South America during the cold winter months. Dickcissels particularly enjoy the sugar cane and small grain fields of Venezuela. In the photos, below, what appears as a whirling tornado or ominous dark cloud is actually thousands of Dickcissels entering their summer roost.



Fascinating Facts on Fauna

Snowy Egret

- Neotropical migration probably began between 10 and 30 million years ago when a largely subtropical climate in North America was gradually replaced by a cooler and distinctly seasonal climate. Migrating birds use the stars and sounds from the earth below to find their way at night.
- As many as 2-5 billion birds fly south from the temperate zone each winter.
- Today, there are about 8,850 different species of birds in the world.
- Many migrants spend 6 to 9 months in the tropics, only spending a short period of time in the temperate zone.
- Birds walk on their toes with their heels in the air.
- Routinely, North American migrants cross the 500 miles of the Gulf of Mexico without resting.
- Using energy at the rate of a Hummingbird, a human would have to eat 340 pounds of potatoes everyday.
- The Arctic Tern, the champion "globe-trotter," flies 10,000 miles every spring and fall traveling between winter and summer grounds.
- Many species of song birds learn their own song from a parent or neighbor.
- A Tundra Swan has about 25,200 feathers on its body, while the Ruby-throated Hummingbird has only about 940.
- The Golden Plover flies 2,400 miles from North American breeding grounds to South American wintering grounds and arrives with only a two-ounce weight loss.
- Groups of birds have special names: a "cast" of hawks, a "flight" of doves, an "exaltation" of larks, a "host" of sparrows.

Spotted Sandpiper

Yellow-bre

Creating A Backyard Haven For Nongame And Migratory Birds

Wetlands, swamps, bogs, tidal flats, and riparian areas are vital habitat corridors to a wide variety of migratory birds. Your own backyard can be an oasis during the long trek south and north for migrating bird populations. Migratory birds need water, food, shelter, and nesting habitat for survival. To attract the largest variety of birds, offer a shallow, constant source of clean water for both drinking and bathing. Place the bird bath in the shade, near cover and keep the water full and fresh all year round.

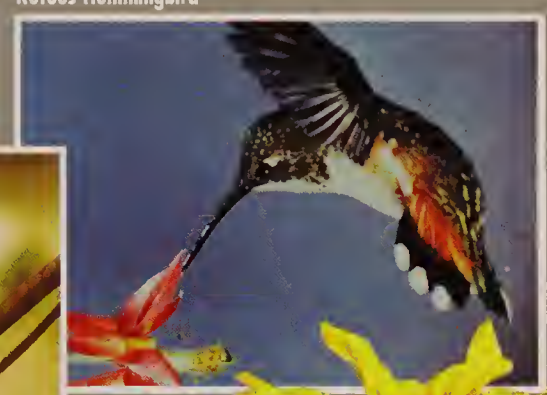
Migratory route of neotropical bird species

Perfect green lawns are for magazine covers, not birds. Grow a few weeds. Several bird species love dandelion seeds. Plant a variety of flowers, shrubs, and trees in your yard. Different vegetation, heights, and shapes furnish diverse cover and food for all birds. Juniper berries, which are really specialized cones, taste awful to us but are loaded with energy for migrating birds. Many types of wild rose offer a lovely, low-maintenance shrub whose "hips" are famous for their energy content and vitamin C. Russian olives have wonderfully aromatic flowers and large fruits. Their spiny branches also provide safe nest sites for birds. Some nongame birds love blackberries and strawberries. Let them have a few bites in exchange for all the insects they take out of your garden. If there are any berries left, you can have great strawberry shortcake and blackberry cobbler. Nectar-producing flowers like honeysuckle, caragana, perlargonium, tiger lilies, bee-balms, scarlet salvias, gladiolus, and trumpet vines will attract hummingbirds. Hummers like insects too!

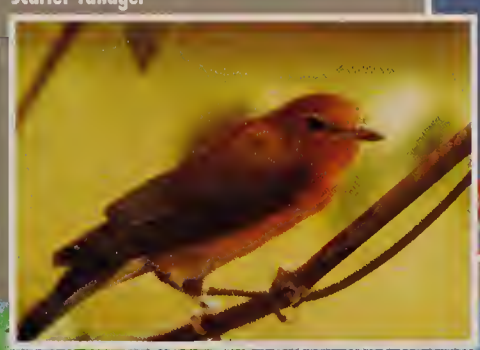
Sunflower seeds are not only packaged, but also grow well in gardens. The giant forms grow quickly and soar above other crops. Plant a small patch of corn just for the birds. The ears of corn, hiding insects, provide a nourishing food source for many birds.

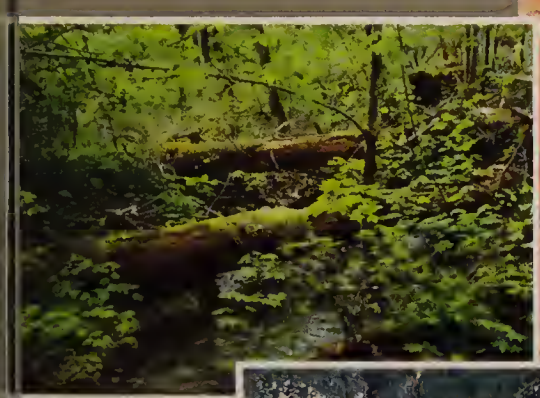
Provide a few square feet of bare area with coarse sand which birds will ingest to aid digestion. Birds like to take a "dust bath" on occasion. Provide a small area with fine, powdery soil for their use. A small brush pile provides excellent hiding cover and will be a valued addition to your yard. After making improvements to attract birds, give them a little time to find them. Birds learn and remember. You will be rewarded with an exciting "Watchable Wildlife" area without leaving your own backyard!

Rufous Hummingbird



Scarlet Tanager





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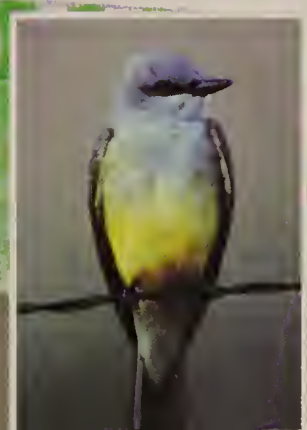

Western Kingbird

The BLM and You!

Through *Fish & Wildlife 2000*, the BLM has cultivated partnerships with other organizations, interest groups, and businesses. This cooperation creates broader public involvement fostering support, assistance, and participation in programs, to enhance fish, wildlife, and special status plant resources on the Nation's public lands.

Americans—amateurs and professionals—contribute extensively to ornithology, the study of birds. Each Christmas season, thousands of amateur birders across North America turn a birding foray into a lasting contribution to the ornithological record by participating in Christmas Bird Counts. Many others help with annual Breeding Bird Surveys, documenting breeding bird abundance's across North America. This legion of birders plays a key role in censusing, preparing atlases, banding, and building historical records. This information is vital to the understanding and conservation of bird species and their habitats.

Volunteer opportunities for birders on BLM lands include providing data for bird checklists on diverse management areas; developing photo libraries; and assisting BLM biologists with on-the-ground habitat improvements.

Fish, wildlife, and special status plant resources are an important aspect of our Nation's heritage. You can be part of safeguarding this legacy for future generations. For more information on the many opportunities awaiting you, contact any of the following BLM offices.

BLM Offices

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7450 Boston Boulevard
Springfield, VA 22153
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(801) 539-4001

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2515 Warren Avenue
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The Nation's forests are a symphony of sounds with the lilting song of the Swainson's Thrush.

This Northern Oriole ponders the long winter "trek" south.